



Simple Gifts

Words to Inspire the Spirit

IMMANUEL CHURCH-ON-THE-HILL

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That Person You'll Never See Again

By The Rev. J. Randolph Alexander, Jr.

One unavoidable aspect that we often take for granted, especially living in an urban area, is that we see and casually interact with many people we will likely never see again in our lives.

I am often blown away by that thought. You know, you exchange a glance with someone in the grocery store, or in traffic, or on a walk. A total stranger smiles, or frowns, or even ignores you, and you think, "I'll never, ever, see them again."

Or, speaking just for myself, I have somehow slighted them in traffic or in the grocery store aisle and I think, "I'll never see them again," in relief. And then I wonder, "What does that mean in light of eternity?"

What does it mean that this person you or I saw for a few seconds is absolutely as beloved by God as are we? What does it mean that they have their own hopes and dreams, their unique memories and regrets,

their joys and foibles, their prejudices, and their passions? What does it mean that all of that reality can be going on for both of us as we just pass by at that exact moment?

Now, I realize we can't know everyone, and that randomly passing by another has to happen, especially when there are so many people around in our populated areas. When I lived in New York, I learned very well how to be a subway rider who didn't really look at people that closely; it was necessary for emotional self-protection. The same happens in this area, but can we as Christians just dismiss all those people, all those precious children of God?

Our faith at least pricks our consciousness when it comes to matters like these. We wonder how God can know others as thoroughly and as completely as we are known by God. If we are bound for eternity together, we will know them on a much deeper level. Maybe we will even harken back to the day we passed each other on the street. Or not? Who knows?

I just have to believe there is a drama behind it all, and a plan.

“But now thus says the Lord,
he who created you, O Jacob,
he who formed you, O Israel:
Do not fear, for I have redeemed you;
I have called you by name, you are mine” (Isaiah 43:1).

This verse speaks of being known, redeemed, called, and loved, by God. We can't know whether or not most of these strangers have responded, or ever will respond, to that call. But we can know and believe that God loves them, and that God is working on and through them, just as on and through us.

Those who are strangers to us are being wooed by the greatest Matchmaker in the world. Can we at least be open to our being agents of the Divine wooing, ambassadors from Home of a still more excellent way of being in this world? By God's grace, I believe that we can.

It's so easy to think, "I'll never see that person again."

But will we?

As you ponder that thought, you may find this music of the [Isaiah scripture](#) inspiring. It may sound familiar – Immanuel's choir sang this anthem at our Homecoming service outside on the grove September 12, 2021.